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USSR: Leadership Ranks in Transition

Summary

Yuriy Andropov has clearly established himself as the Soviet Union's top leader. He is moving cautiously, nonetheless, to place his stamp on key personnel decisions. While a number of changes have been announced since he became General Secretary, most appear to have been the product of compromise and some may even have been decided before Brezhnev's death. The cumulative effect of the actions already taken, however, has given the impression of decisive movement after the stagnation of Brezhnev's last years, and [redacted] major new appointments are likely in the spring. [redacted]

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Opportunities and Constraints

Andropov has a unique opportunity--greater than Brezhnev ever enjoyed--to influence within a relatively short period the selection of the next generation of party and government leaders. As a result of the emphasis on cadre stability during the Brezhnev years and the reluctance of the old guard to bring new blood into the top ranks of the party, as well as vacancies caused by the death of Brezhnev and others, a record number of positions are now or soon will be vacant. [redacted]

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] the Domestic Issues Branch, Policy Analysis Division, Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Policy Analysis Division [redacted]

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Brezhnev's heirs, in addition, apparently recognize that the job security of the past 18 years has fostered a permissive climate of corruption and that some sort of housecleaning is in order. To judge from Andropov's words and actions, he intends to capitalize on this sentiment using a campaign against corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency in the party and government to weed out deadwood and bring in new people of his own. [REDACTED]

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Andropov, however, faces certain disadvantages in attempting to extend his influence within the party and government. His experience has been almost entirely in the foreign policy arena, and he has not held the kind of posts, other than as head of the KGB, that would allow him to develop a wide network of clients or allies that he can draw on to staff key party and government positions. Brezhnev, by contrast, had years of party executive experience as the head of various regional party organizations and several stints in the central party apparatus that gave him an extensive network of invaluable personal contacts. [REDACTED]

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The relatively high proportion of officials with KGB backgrounds among recent appointments attests to Andropov's appreciation of the importance of an institutional base, but the KGB has obvious limitations for this purpose. He will likely have to rely on other Politburo colleagues for recommendations for staffing key positions. Although officials now being promoted to leading posts will undoubtedly see it in their own interest to serve him loyally regardless of their past ties, Andropov's dependence on his colleagues gives them some political leverage and serves to reinforce continued collegiality within the leadership. [REDACTED]

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While Andropov has become the preeminent leader in the Politburo, he would appear to be indebted to those who reportedly helped him gain the top party post, Defense Minister Dmitriy Ustinov and Ukrainian party boss Vladimir Shcherbitskiy in particular. [REDACTED] Shcherbitskiy chaired the Politburo meeting that chose Andropov, and Ustinov nominated him. Brezhnev's closest associates, moreover--Premier Nikolay Tikhonov and Party Secretary Konstantin Chernenko, Andropov's putative rival--continue to hold positions of power in the Politburo and will constitute a brake on Andropov's acquisition of power as long as they remain so situated. [REDACTED]

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Signs of Resistance

Despite a generally impressive beginning, the results of the Central Committee plenum and Supreme Soviet session following Brezhnev's funeral indicate that Andropov has encountered some resistance in consolidating his power. The Politburo failed to select a new Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the few personnel decisions that were taken seemed to reflect political compromise. [redacted]

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The Presidency - The Job Nobody Wanted?

Numerous rumors were floated in the week preceding the Plenum and Supreme Soviet session concerning the choice of a new president. Many of these reports came from what appears to be an Andropov promotional network [redacted]

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[redacted] These sources strongly indicated that three candidates were under consideration: Chernenko, Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko and Andropov himself. The selection of Chernenko would have effectively removed him from his powerful post in the party Secretariat and was, reportedly, Andropov's first choice. Barring that or the choice of Gromyko, an Andropov ally, Andropov was expected to take the post himself. [redacted]

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[redacted] Chernenko and Gromyko were able to avoid being reassigned to what is largely a ceremonial post and that Andropov also turned it down. While sources close to the Andropov camp are pushing the line that Andropov does not want the job, it is one that would add measurably to his prestige, and it is more likely that he is playing a politically astute waiting game. He may still be hoping to maneuver Chernenko into the post at a later date and, failing that, he probably calculates that his own claim to the post can only improve with the passage of time. Whatever the reasons, however, failure to fill this important post promptly has left an impression of some leadership indecision and disarray that the Andropov network has not been able to entirely dispell. [redacted]

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Changes at the Top

Few personnel actions were taken by the plenum, and most appear to have been in the works before Brezhnev's death. Planning official Nikolay Ryzhkov was named to the party secretariat and Azerbaijan party boss Geydar Aliyev was

elevated to full membership on the Politburo. Two days later at the Supreme Soviet session his appointment as First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers was announced.

Ryzhkov, [redacted] is being brought in as an "idea man," Aliyev to "get things done." [redacted]

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The Ryzhkov Appointment. Nikolay Ryzhkov's career has been focused entirely outside of party apparatus work. He had been a first deputy chairman of Gosplan since 1979 with responsibilities for heavy industry and machine building, and before that served for many years as manager of a huge machine building complex in Sverdlovsk. He presumably owed his Gosplan position to Andrey Kirilenko, who headed the Sverdlovsk party organization back in the early 1950s. Ryzhkov's close connections with the Sverdlovsk group suggests that his appointment may have been part of a prior political deal linked to securing Kirilenko's departure from the Politburo. Ryzhkov is [redacted]

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[redacted] the kind of energetic manager that Andropov is looking for, but Andropov is unlikely to have been acquainted personally with him. [redacted]

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[redacted] Ryzhkov has been brought into the Secretariat to head the newly established Economics Department. This department, which has been identified in Pravda, is an expansion of the old Planning and Finance Organs Department and reportedly will be responsible for studying economic reform ideas, particularly in the industrial sector of the economy. [redacted]

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The Aliyev Appointment. The appointment of Aliyev to the Council of Ministers was, in a way, the most puzzling action taken. While there had been rumors earlier in the summer that Aliyev might be elevated to the Politburo, his government appointment was unexpected and even caught the Supreme Soviet deputies by surprise [redacted]

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[redacted] Aliyev is Andropov's man and has been brought in to spear-head the drive to ferret out bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption and enforce greater managerial accountability at all levels of the government. He will reportedly have specific responsibility for the troubled transportation sector. Aliyev's subsequent attendance at a meeting at the railways ministry (it was sharply criticized by Andropov at the plenum and is now undergoing a shake-up) would seem to bear this out. [redacted]

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Aliyev's Politburo status makes him the number two man in the Council of Ministers [redacted]

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While Aliyev has made a name for himself rooting out corruption in Azerbaijan and has been credited with the remarkable economic recovery of the republic, he, nevertheless, would seem to lack important qualifications for the premiership and even for the deputy post. He is not himself entirely free of the taint of corruption. (There have been rumors that some of his republic's economic achievement are based on falsified data). He has not had experience at the national level and does not know his way around the Moscow bureaucracy. Moreover, his Muslim background is not likely to endear him to the largely slavic Moscow bureaucracy and is perhaps the most important strike against him for the premiership. [redacted]

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Why Aliyev was named as first deputy premier rather than some other more qualified official such as Shcherbitskiy is all the more puzzling in view of Aliyev's rather checkered past political allegiances. Aliyev reportedly was closer to Brezhnev's protege, KGB First Deputy Chairman Tsvigun, than to Andropov. [redacted] Aliyev had been solidly in the Brezhnev-Chernenko camp until recently and may have owed his promotion to the Politburo in part to their backing. [redacted] Aliyev was Chernenko's choice to replace Andropov as Chairman of the KGB last May, but he lost out to Vitaliy Fedorchuk, the Ukrainian KGB chief, who reportedly had the solid backing of Shcherbitskiy and Andropov. [redacted]

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Aliyev, in fact, probably owes his elevation to support from both camps, but will almost certainly be more sensitive to Andropov's interests. Andropov, in addition, may feel that Aliyev's ties to all groupings will deflect some of the resentment away from him that is sure to develop if Aliyev's effort to crack the whip runs into resistance. Andropov also would probably be willing to disassociate himself from Aliyev if he becomes too controversial. [redacted]

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The Shrinking Party Secretariat. As anticipated, the Central Committee plenum dropped Kirilenko from the Politburo and Secretariat on the stated grounds of ill health. The reason for Kirilenko's eclipse remains something of a mystery, but considerable evidence suggest that illness and a scandal

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involving a member of his family earlier this year made him vulnerable to the machinations of political rivals. In any event, he had already been excluded from the leadership some time before Brezhnev died, and his removal at the plenum was only a formality. [redacted]

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With Brezhnev's death, the death of Suslov earlier in the year and now Kirilenko's retirement, the number of senior secretaries (those with full membership in the Politburo) has dropped from five to three: Andropov, Chernenko and the secretary in charge of agriculture, Gorbachev. Party Secretary Dolgikh, who oversees the heavy industry sector and had been filling in for Kirilenko during his absences, was expected in Soviet circles to be elevated to full membership in the Politburo at the plenum to replace Kirilenko, but such a move may have run into some political difficulty. He is from the Siberian region of Krasnoyarsk, an area known to receive special attention from Chernenko. [redacted]

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Chernenko Hangs In

By most Soviet accounts, Chernenko offered little resistance to the Andropov blitz following Brezhnev's death. In so doing he seems to have protected his position in the leadership, and he continues to be an important political force. [redacted]

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Chernenko appears to be performing the functions of unofficial "second secretary"--the same functions that Suslov carried out under Brezhnev--and he has recently been ranked right after Andropov in Politburo line-ups. [redacted]

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[redacted] Chernenko now chairs meetings of the Secretariat. He evidently has taken over Suslov's former responsibilities on the party secretariat for culture, propaganda and ideology as well and there is tenuous evidence that he has some responsibility for overseeing personnel assignments. Perhaps as a consequence of these new duties and due to the General Secretary's prerogative for having his own man as the Politburo's executive officer, Chernenko has apparently given up his job as head of the General Department. Nonetheless, his long time assistant Bogolyubov has reportedly gotten the job. [redacted]

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Chernenko and Andropov appear to share many views on policy issues and may conceivably have worked out a modus vivendi. The new practice of publicizing regular Thursday Politburo meetings, for example, seems to reflect Chernenko's long-standing interest in promoting a more open style of

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leadership and the first reported item on the Politburo agenda--work with letters from Soviet citizens--is one with which he has been closely identified. The present arrangement is an inherently unstable one, however, in view of their political rivalry, and it is clearly in Andropov's interest either to ease Chernenko out of the Secretariat or bring someone else in to act as a counterweight. [redacted]

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The Pace of Personnel Actions Picks Up

Following the plenum a number of important appointments were made to second level party and government posts, but again some of them would appear to have been in the works since earlier in the year. In a musical chairs round of appointments, First Secretary of the Komsomol (youth) organization, Boris Pastukhov, was replaced by one of his deputies and transferred to the less important post of Chairman of the state publishing committee. The former head of the committee, Boris Stukalin, in turn, moved up to replace the chief of the Central Committee's Propaganda Department, Yevgeniy Tyazhelnikov. The latter has since been given an ambassadorial post. There were rumors shortly after Suslov died in January that both Tyazhelnikov and Pastukhov would be fired as part of an effort to remove Suslov people from positions of power. Chernenko's apparent assumption now of Suslov's former responsibilities for culture, ideology and propaganda suggest that he is likely to have had some hand in carrying this out, although Andropov's approval would have been required. [redacted]

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The KGB-MVD Switch

The most important reshuffling of assignments since Andropov took over was the replacement of Brezhnev's close associate Nikolay Shchelokov as Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD) by KGB chief Fedorchuk, and the elevation in turn of First Deputy Chairman of the KGB, Viktor Chebrikov to head the KGB. These moves have allowed Andropov to expand his control over both security organs. The shift is one of the clearest signs of Andropov's authority to date. [redacted]

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On the face of it, the appointment represents a demotion for Fedorchuk, but his initial assignment to the KGB post last May was unusual (typically a professional cop is not picked for this role) and one for which he would not appear to have been well qualified. The choice of Fedorchuk was probably made with succession-related politics in mind rather than considerations of the requirements of the top KGB post.

Andropov presumably supported him as part of an effort to bring Shcherbitskiy into his camp and to block any Brezhnev-Chernenko candidate--whether it be Aliyev or one of Brezhnev's men among the KGB deputies. [REDACTED]

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Having accomplished this and after he emerged on top, Andropov was presumably willing to reconsider the appointment. There is certain to have been widespread unhappiness at having a relatively junior KGB professional appointed to the top KGB post, particularly among senior officials in the organization, and Andropov's interests may have been better served by having Fedorchuk take the MVD post. Fedorchuk reportedly has a mandate to clean up the corruption-riddled police organization and has since been promoted to the rank of General. [REDACTED]

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The new KGB chief, Chebrikov, like Andropov, has a background in party work. He served for many years in the Dnepropetrovsk party organization, Brezhnev's former political bailiwick in the Ukraine, and was transferred to the KGB in 1967 along with another close Brezhnev associate soon after Andropov was appointed head. Chebrikov has worked closely with Andropov for the past 14 years, however, and they reportedly are on good terms. [REDACTED]

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Winds of Change

There are growing expectations among the Soviet elite that more important changes are in the offing. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The impression has been left that in the process of working his way to the top party post, Andropov dangled the possibility of high level posts before a number of would-be supporters: Shcherbitskiy, Aliyev, and maybe Dolgikh, and he now may be encountering some problems in how to honor these political debts. [REDACTED]

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The cumulative impact of these changes, real and anticipated, contributes to the impression that the long-delayed rejuvenation of the party and government ranks is finally underway, after the near paralysis of Brezhnev's last years. Moreover, Andropov seems to be perceived by the Soviet elite as firmly in control of this process, even if he has not been the principal initiator or sole beneficiary of each individual action. [REDACTED]

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